

# AgoraQuest – Joke Book

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**A** Spark & Anvil joke book. Groan-worthy puns, tricky riddles, silly nonsense, and real fun facts from the world of AgoraQuest – read them out loud and make someone laugh.

## Why is "steelmanning" the classy move?

Because arguing against the **STRONGEST** version of the other side is more honest -- and more convincing -- than knocking down a weak one.

## How to use this book

Read a joke, pause at the question, and try to guess the answer before you read on. Best of all: read them out loud to a friend, a grown-up, or your class. A good laugh makes the tricky stuff easier – that's real science.

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## AgoraQuest – Joke Book

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## Puns

### Why is "steelmanning" the classy move?

💡 Because arguing against the STRONGEST version of the other side is more honest -- and more convincing -- than knocking down a weak one.

### Why is a "straw man" such a cheap trick?

💡 Because it wins by attacking an argument nobody actually made.

### Why did the ad hominem lose the debate on principle?

💡 Because attacking the PERSON instead of their argument proves nothing about whether they're right.

### Why does "fact vs opinion" matter so much?

💡 Because a fact can be checked against evidence, while an opinion is a judgment -- and mixing them up derails any discussion.

### Why do good thinkers "consider the source"?

💡 Because who is making a claim, and why, affects how much you should trust it before checking further.

### Why is a "false dilemma" a trap?

💡 Because it pretends there are only two options when there are really many.

### **Why does the "slippery slope" argument slide too far?**

💡 Because it assumes one small step **MUST** lead to an extreme end, without proving each step actually follows.

### **Why is "appeal to authority" only half a point?**

💡 Because an expert's opinion is worth considering, but "an expert said so" isn't proof by itself -- especially outside their field.

### **Why does confirmation bias feel so comfortable?**

💡 Because we love evidence that agrees with us and quietly ignore the evidence that doesn't.

### **Why is a "loaded question" not really a question?**

💡 Because it smuggles in an assumption you never agreed to.

### **Why is the "bandwagon" a weak reason?**

💡 Because "everyone believes it" doesn't make something true -- popularity isn't proof.

### **Why do good debaters listen first?**

💡 Because you can't respond to an argument you never bothered to understand.

### **Why is "whataboutism" a distraction?**

💡 Because answering a criticism by pointing at someone ELSE'S faults doesn't address the original point.

### **Why is checking a headline against the actual article a superpower?**

💡 Because headlines are written to grab attention, not to tell the whole, careful truth.

### **Why is "correlation is not causation" a debater's shield?**

💡 Because "these two things happened together" doesn't prove one caused the other.

### **Why is granting a good point on the other side actually strong?**

💡 Because acknowledging what's true in an opposing view makes YOUR reasoning look fair and credible.

### **Why is "attacking the argument, not the arguer" the golden rule of debate?**

💡 Because ideas can be examined; insulting a person just ends the conversation.

### **Why do trade-offs matter more than slogans?**

💡 Because most real decisions involve giving up SOMETHING to gain something else -- and pretending otherwise is dishonest.

### **Why is a primary source often stronger than a summary of it?**

💡 Because reading the original lets you judge it yourself instead of trusting someone else's spin.

### **Why is changing your mind with new evidence a strength, not a weakness?**

💡 Because updating your view when the facts change is exactly what good thinking looks like.

## Riddles

**What does it mean to "steelman" an argument?**

💡 To restate the OTHER side's position in its strongest, fairest form before responding to it! It's the opposite of a straw man -- and it makes your own reasoning more honest and persuasive.

**A person argues against a position their opponent never actually held. What fallacy is this?**

💡 A "straw man"! It "wins" by knocking down a weak, distorted version of the argument instead of the real one.

**Someone responds to an argument by insulting the person who made it, rather than the argument itself. What's this called?**

💡 "Ad hominem" (Latin for "to the person")! It's a fallacy because a person's flaws don't determine whether their argument is correct.

**What's the difference between a fact and an opinion?**

💡 A fact can be verified against evidence ("water boils at 100 degrees Celsius at sea level"); an opinion is a judgment or preference ("this is the best movie"). Both are valid to hold -- but only one can be fact-checked.

**An argument claims there are only two options ("either we do this, or disaster"), ignoring other possibilities. What fallacy is this?**

💡 A "false dilemma" (or false dichotomy)! Real situations usually have more than two options.

**"If we allow X, then inevitably Y, then Z, then total catastrophe!" -- with no proof each step follows. What fallacy is this?**

💡 A "slippery slope"! It assumes a chain of consequences without showing each link actually holds.

**Why is "an expert said so" not automatically proof?**

💡 Because it's an "appeal to authority." An expert's view is worth considering, but it must still rest on evidence -- and experts can be wrong, biased, or speaking outside their field.

**You mostly notice and remember evidence that supports what you already believe. What is this tendency called?**

💡 "Confirmation bias"! Everyone has it, which is why deliberately seeking out disagreeing evidence is such a valuable habit.

**"Have you stopped cheating on tests?"**

💡 " -- either answer admits guilt. What's wrong with this question? It's a "loaded question": it smuggles in an assumption (that you WERE cheating) you never agreed to. Fair questions don't hide their premises.

**"Millions of people believe it, so it must be true." What fallacy is this?**

💡 The "bandwagon" (or appeal to popularity)! How many people believe something has no bearing on whether it's actually true.

**When someone answers a criticism by saying "well, what about THIS other thing you did?"**

💡 ", what tactic is that? "Whataboutism"! It deflects from the original point by raising a different issue, rather than actually addressing the criticism.

**When evaluating a source, what questions should you ask?**

💡 Who created it and why? What's their expertise and possible bias? Is it supported by evidence? Can it be corroborated elsewhere? Considering the source is step one of media literacy.

**Why should you read the full article, not just the headline?**

💡 Because headlines are written to grab attention and can exaggerate or distort. The careful truth is usually in the details the headline skips!

**In a good-faith deliberation, why is it valuable to acknowledge a strong point on the OTHER side?**

💡 Because it shows intellectual honesty and makes your own position more credible. Refusing to grant any valid opposing point signals you're not really thinking.

**On a genuine question of VALUES (like how to balance freedom and safety), is there usually a single objectively "correct" answer?**

💡 Rarely! Values questions involve weighing competing goods, and reasonable people disagree. The skill is reasoning honestly about the TRADE-OFFS, not declaring one side simply right.

**Two events happen together, and someone concludes one caused the other. What must you remember?**

💡 Correlation is not causation! You need more evidence -- ideally a controlled comparison -- before claiming a cause-and-effect link.

**What's the difference between a "primary" and a "secondary" source?**

💡 A primary source is original, first-hand evidence (a speech, a photo, an eyewitness account); a secondary source describes or interprets it (a textbook, a news analysis). Going to the primary source lets you judge for yourself.

**Is changing your opinion when you encounter strong new evidence a sign of weakness?**

💡 No -- it's a sign of good thinking! Updating your view based on evidence is exactly how reasoning is supposed to work. Refusing to ever update is the real weakness.

**In a respectful deliberation with someone you disagree with, what's a productive first move?**

💡 Genuinely UNDERSTAND their view -- even restate it back to them fairly -- before responding. You can't have a real dialogue about a position you never understood.

**A claim is presented with no evidence, and the arguer says "prove me wrong." Whose job is it to provide evidence?**

💡 The person making the claim! This is the "burden of proof" -- you can't demand others disprove an unsupported assertion.

## Silly Stuff

A debater built an elaborate straw man of their opponent's view, demolished it triumphantly, and their opponent quietly noted they'd never said any of that. Winning against an argument nobody made is not, technically, winning.

Someone lost an argument on the merits, so they attacked the other person's haircut instead. The haircut, sadly, had no bearing on the facts. Ad hominem: when you're out of points, aim for the person.

A person insisted there were "only two options" in a situation that plainly had at least six, and everyone politely counted them out loud. A false dilemma shrinks the world down to a coin flip that reality never agreed to.

A slippery-slope argument slid from "let students choose their lunch" all the way to "the collapse of society" without pausing to prove a single step along the way. Slopes are slippery; arguments should have footholds.

Someone sought out only the evidence that agreed with them, ignored everything that didn't, and concluded they were "obviously right." Confirmation bias is the most comfortable chair in the room, and it's facing a mirror.

A person answered a serious criticism with "well, WHAT ABOUT that other completely unrelated thing?" and briefly thought they'd won. Whataboutism doesn't refute a point; it just changes the subject and hopes nobody notices.

A headline screamed something dramatic, the actual article calmly said the opposite, and thousands of people shared the headline without ever opening it. The gap between a headline and a story is where most misunderstandings are born.

A steelman was so fair to the opposing side that it accidentally made the other person's argument sound BETTER than they'd made it themselves. That's not a bug; that's the whole point. Beat the strongest version or beat nothing.

A "loaded question" walked in disguised as a simple yes-or-no, smuggling an entire accusation past the border. Every answer confirmed the hidden premise. The trick is refusing the premise, not the question.

Someone cited "a study" with no author, no source, and no evidence, then demanded everyone "prove them wrong." The burden of proof, quietly and correctly, stayed exactly where it started: with the claim-maker.

"Everyone believes it" was offered as the entire argument, and a small skeptic pointed out that everyone once believed the Earth was flat. Popularity is a headcount, not a proof. The bandwagon has been wrong before.

Two people fought bitterly, then realized they were arguing a values question with no single right answer, both holding a real piece of the trade-off. Sometimes the honest conclusion is "we weigh these goods differently," and that's allowed.

A debater actually changed their mind when shown strong evidence, and half the room called it "flip-flopping" while the other half called it "thinking." One of those halves was correct. Updating on evidence is the feature, not the bug.

Someone noticed ice cream sales and crime both rise in summer and confidently proposed banning ice cream to reduce crime. Correlation strutted in, causation was nowhere to be found, and the sun quietly ran both.

A person actually READ the primary source instead of the hot take about the primary source, and discovered the hot take had gotten it backwards. Going to the original is a shockingly effective way to not be fooled.

## Fun Facts

Did you know? "Steelmanning" -- restating an opponent's argument in its STRONGEST form before responding -- is the opposite of a straw man. It's considered the gold standard of honest debate, because it means you're engaging the real idea!

Did you know? A "straw man" fallacy attacks a distorted, weakened version of an argument nobody actually made. Learning to spot it protects you from being fooled -- and keeps you from accidentally doing it yourself!

Did you know? "Ad hominem" means attacking the PERSON instead of their argument. It's a fallacy because someone's character or flaws have no bearing on whether their specific claim is actually true!

Did you know? "Confirmation bias" -- favoring evidence that agrees with us and ignoring the rest -- affects everyone, including experts. That's why deliberately seeking out the strongest DISAGREEING evidence is one of the best thinking habits!

Did you know? Distinguishing a "fact" (verifiable against evidence) from an "opinion" (a judgment or preference) is a foundational reasoning skill. Many arguments go nowhere simply because the two get tangled together!

Did you know? A "false dilemma" tricks you into thinking there are only two options ("us or chaos") when reality usually offers many. Spotting the missing third, fourth, and fifth options is a powerful move!

Did you know? The "burden of proof" rests on whoever makes a claim -- not on others to disprove it. "You can't prove I'm wrong" is not evidence that you're right. Unsupported assertions can simply be set aside!

Did you know? Media literacy means checking WHO made a message, WHY, and whether it's supported by evidence. A headline is written to grab clicks; the careful truth is usually in the article it's summarizing!

Did you know? "Whataboutism" deflects a criticism by pointing at someone else's faults instead of answering. It feels like a comeback, but it doesn't actually address the original point -- it just changes the subject!

Did you know? On genuine questions of VALUES, reasonable people often disagree because they weigh competing goods differently -- there isn't always one objectively "correct" answer. Good deliberation focuses on the honest trade-offs, not on declaring a winner!

Did you know? Going to a "primary source" -- the original speech, document, or data -- lets you judge for yourself instead of trusting someone else's interpretation. Historians, scientists, and journalists all prize primary sources!

Did you know? Acknowledging a valid point on the OTHER side of a debate actually makes YOUR argument more credible. It signals intellectual honesty - and refusing to ever grant an opposing point is a sign you've stopped thinking!

Did you know? "Correlation is not causation" applies in arguments too. "These two things happen together" doesn't prove one causes the other -- a favorite way that misleading claims sneak past careless readers!

Did you know? Truly UNDERSTANDING someone's view before responding - even restating it back to them -- is the foundation of productive deliberation. You can't have a real conversation about a position you never bothered to grasp!

Did you know? Changing your mind in response to strong new evidence isn't "flip-flopping" -- it's exactly how good reasoning works. The willingness to update beliefs is one of the most underrated intellectual virtues!

## Keep laughing

That's **70 jokes** from AgoraQuest. Made someone laugh? Try making up your own – the best jokes are the ones you tell.

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